

Green and Blue

by RenoXanders

Category: Halo

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Romance

Language: English

Characters: C. Halsey, Cortana, Master Chief/John-117, OC

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-02-07 03:21:27

Updated: 2014-04-04 02:31:28

Packaged: 2016-04-27 03:46:36

Rating: M

Chapters: 3

Words: 13,163

Publisher: [www.fanfiction.net](http://www.fanfiction.net)

Summary: \*AN Big rewrite\* Cortana is gone. The Master Chief is struggling with his new tumultuous emotions and is desperately trying to escape the pain. Fate is a twisted mistress. Set around three months after the end of Halo 4 in a sort of not exactly cannon AU, as my idea runs a slightly different path.

## 1. Chapter 1

\*\*~~Chapter One~~\*\*

"Damn it! John! I'm locking down your armor for reentry, BRACE!" The voice of his now three months deceased ancilla, Cortana, practically screams in his head as his boots are jarred loose from their contact with the hull fragment he was clinging to moments ago. "Right." Is all he growls to himself as his suit pressurizes and forces his limbs into an almost fetal position. He tries not to think about her right now, there are more important things to think about. Every so often the systems in his suit will expel a microburst of data; remnants of Cortana's former self. Sometimes it's a phrase or a word, sometimes an image. But they always occur when John is least expecting it and they always send a pang of intense loss and wrenching sadness through his heart. He blinks back the threatening tears and swallows hard, focusing on controlling his breathing and remaining calm for the rough reentry.

The covenant freighter is only pieces now, after being torn in half by a slipspace portal that opened and then malfunctioned in a fraction of a second-closing prematurely and transporting only part of the ship to its proposed relocation site in the orbit of Charybdis IX's outermost moon. However, the gravitational slingshot effect afforded by the now smaller mass of the portion of the hull that went through the portal and the next closest moon not only tore the remains of the vessel apart, but sent it hurtling at a great speed towards the nearby planet. Which is, as luck would have it, a human-colonized planet.

Also, as it seems, luck would determine that the Master Chief would be on the part of the ship that \_did \_go through the portal. So, here he is, plummeting through this planet's atmosphere at an ungodly speed, surrounded by Covenant and UNSC wreckage, completely at the mercy of gravity and fate. Wherever he lands, it will be a very, \_very \_hard landing. This much he knows, and so he falls, waiting to be knocked the hell out whenever he lands.

~~~On the planet surface, life goes on as though nothing is yet happeningâ€¦|~~~

Jo's alarm clock blares to life, waking the hell out of her with a far too happy "\_Good morning Ponte Verde! It's a beautiful 75 degrees, and mostly sunny outside today, Trafficon reports that the Eastern Interstate traffic is minimal and is expected to clear within the hour. It's 8:05on this Thursday morning. Now, back to\_-" She smacks the 'off' button and stretches, yawning.

After plodding sleepily through her morning routine, she sits down with a hot cup of black tea in front of the living-room television to watch the morning news broadcast. The first thing that comes through is an emergency broadcast tone, then the accompanying bulletin. "\_United Nations Space Command Charybdis IX outpost warning system has issued a falling space debris warning for the following counties, Valente, Newport, Haliford, Exodus, Ponte Verde, Greenvale and Northwood. An unidentified mass of metallic debris is entering the atmosphere and will cause a minor disturbance due to its brightness. Residents are advised not to look directly at the burning debris as this may cause temporary retinal damage, and, residents are further encouraged to remain indoors in the event of large debris falling in your area. This warning is in effect for the next hour and a half unless stated otherwise\_."

Jo shrugs and turns off the television, 'more space junkâ€¦|great. Whatever, I'm going for my run anyway.' She gulps down the rest of her tea and goes to change into her running clothes.

She is about a mile into her run and she's feeling great. The sun is shining amicably and the air is warm but pleasant. She soon becomes aware of a distant rumble that slowly gets louder. She slows down a bit to try and figure out what exactly that sound is. Then, she spots the bright shapes streaking through the sparse clouds at incredible speed. Her eyes go wide; the shapes are barreling right at her!

The roar of the burning debris hurtling through the atmosphere hammers into her eardrums as she sprints for the relative safety of a huge old pin oak tree with wide sweeping branches. From her vantage point beneath the age old tree she watches as daylight doubles in brightness and chunks of flaming stuff ranging in size from a mailbox to a semi trailer start crashing into the dirt all around the little park she is in.

Just when she thought it couldn't get any brighter, it does. A hulking tangle of metallic junk careens right towards the tree with a bone-jarring rumble, slamming heavily into the ground and skidding a good few tens of feet before coming to a groaning halt. Dirt and chunks of grass spew everywhere and she shields her eyes, coughing and gagging on the smoke.

It's quiet for a moment and she hazards a peek out from under the tree. Looking up into the sky she sees still more, smaller pieces of debris hurtling towards her and she leaps backwards just in time as another large mass of space junk crashes to the ground a little less than four feet in front of her. "SHIT!" She lets out a terrified scream as dirt covers her from head to toe and gets in her eyes, nose and mouth.

As she manages to get some of the dirt and grime out of her eyes and mouth she notices how quiet it is now. The only sounds are the crackling of fire and the muffled sound of people coughing in the distance. The dust is starting to clear and she is able to begin making out shapes in the debris around her. The closest being the chunk that nearly squashed her. She leans closer to the fairly large crater and peers into the smoking depression to see what she can only describe as a very large, like, almost ten foot tall, humanoid robot looking thing. Her eyes go wide and she squeaks in terror. Leaping back away from the crater and scooting back on her bum, her back hits the tree trunk and she jumps, then realizes it's just the tree and recollects herself.

She is overcome by the overwhelming urge to go look back in the crater though. So, hesitantly she crawls back over and takes in more details. It looks like a very tall robot indeed, in a sort of hunched over seated position, dirt mounded up behind its back, propping it up in this crater it obviously created. It has olive drab colored armor plates over a black, honeycomb patterned under-armor and a helmet with a gleaming golden visor that she cannot see through. Its limbs are stuck forward and up, slightly bent at the elbow, like it fell back-first and got frozen that way. "How strange!" she whispers. There is a hiss and the limbs all go limp and the head lolls to the side. Her reaction is silent this time, though she jerks back a little, still focused raptly on this green robot thing. A sudden sizzle of static washes over her, making her hair stand up. She sees golden shimmers of what look like electricity dance a half inch or so above the entire body of this robot for a moment and hears a soft electronic whine that comes from the inside of the helmet.

Then, it, or perhaps, he lets out a groan and shifts, slumping fully to his right side. Jo's eyes go wide as the robot reaches up to his head and starts to pull it off! But wait, it's a helmet! Underneath the helmet is a man's face. Jo's heart stops for a moment as she makes the connection that this human man has just fallen from fucking orbit. The man sets the helmet beside him as he rolls onto his back and lets his head rest on the soil. One of his hands absently wipes his forehead. There's blood on the gauntleted fingers when he pulls it away. That arm falls limply to his side.

"Are you ok?" she manages to squeak and the man looks over at her with piercing blue eyes and makes a little nod. There's blood running down his forehead from a gash on top of his head and it's caking up a clump or two of dark brown hair. He blinks, rolls back over and sits up, grabbing his helmet as he gets tiredly to his feet.

"Are you hurt?" his voice startles her, it is low, gravelly, but surprisingly gentle.

"No! I'm fine! how did you?" Jo looks up at the sky, then back at the large man, who is now climbing out of the crater right in front of her. "Oh!" she starts, stumbling back on her bum and he offers her

his hand. All she can do is stare at him. He's freaking gigantic!

"Ma'm, Take my hand please, I'm going to need your help." The man says softly but sternly, snapping her from her daze. Jo gingerly takes his hand and he effortlessly lifts her to her feet.

"How can \_I \_help \_you\_?" Jo asks, staring up at the immensely tall man.

"Primarily, by telling me this planet's name." he says, his voice is low, like he doesn't really want to be heard but by her.

"Uh, it's Charybdis Nine." She says softly. They make eye contact again and a shiver runs down her spine.

"Ok good, at least it's the right system. Now, this second request may be a bit rude but I am in desperate need of a meal, could you perhaps-"

Jo does not even let him finish asking, she impulsively agrees, "Of course! I can feed you, no problem." Then it dawns on her, this man just fell from space, nearly squashed her and is also like, probably ten feet tall. Not to mention she doesn't even know the guy. Sure it's a perfectly good idea to invite this stranger into your home for a bite to eat. No big deal. Mentally, she face-palms. "Um, this way, I guess" she starts to navigate the debris field and head to her house to feed this giant armored space guy.

Jo opens her front door and walks in, turning to invite the man in. He ducks into the doorway and she waves him into the kitchen. 'Thank goodness for vaulted ceilings.' Immediately she busies herself with the fixings for sandwiches as a heavy thunk sounds at her kitchen table. She looks over to see the helmet on the table and the tall man maneuvering his massive frame into a seated position against the wall. His arms rest on his bent knees and the back of his head is on the wall. Obviously seeing the utter confusion in her face, the man offers a soft, "I'm a bit too heavy to sit in your chairs. They'll break. This armor's a little over a thousand pounds on its own. But don't worry; I'm just fine down here."

"Oh, okay then" She goes back to making the sandwich. "Do you like-?"

The man stops her short, "Everything. I like it all."

"Right, got it." Jo finishes the sandwich with all the condiments and layers another slice of ham turkey and roast beef on just for good measure, since this man is rather large she figures he can easily polish off the sandwich without a worry." She hands him the plate with a timid smile, "Here you go mister" um"

Their eyes meet and she sees a strange sea of emotions behind the hardened wall that she can tell has been there for quite some time. His brow furrows and he looks away. "Just call me Master Chief for now." He says in a low voice, accepting the plate graciously and he digs into the sandwich hungrily.

"So, are you one of those Spartan soldiers I hear about from the UNSC Navy? Because, you're awfully tall."

The Master Chief just nods curtly, continuing to wolf down the sandwich.

After quickly consuming two thirds of the sandwich in a matter of moments he stops and looks at Jo, who has taken a seat at the other side of the table, silently staring at the helmet. "Excuse me," he starts softly and she looks over at him "Sorry to be a burden, but may I have another two sandwiches like this one. I will see to it that you are fully reimbursed, but you might have to wait. Again, I am sorry."

Immediately she is on her feet, "No no! Don't apologize for being hungry, Sir. I am more than happy to accommodate you. I know it's rather unconventional how we came to meet each other, but I still enjoy having a guest for onceâ€¦ Strange as he isâ€¦" She trails off and busies herself with making another two sandwiches for the Master Chief.

The next few minutes pass in silence as the Master Chief polishes off the third sandwich and wipes a few crumbs from the corners of his mouth. "Thank you very much." He says softly. "Now, I must excuse myself for a moment. I will be back; I just need to step outside." He gets to his feet and grabs his helmet, slipping it over his head and walking outside; Jo watches him for a moment, he just stands there, looking up at the sky, so she cleans up.

The Master Chief is attempting to hail the UNSC *\_Infinity\_*, which was stationed a few clicks from the junk vessel that was destroyed by the malfunctioning slipspace drive. After three unanswered hailings, He finally gets a response. "UNSC *\_Infinity\_*, this is Master Chief Petty Officer Sierra One One Seven, I have crash-landed on Charybdis Nine, and my status is yellow. However, I have a somewhat secure place to stay while I await extraction. What is your ETA?"

{"\_Sierra One One Seven, this is Lasky. Good Copy. We read you loud and clear. Glad you made it safe. ETA is unfortunately unknown, you'll have to dig in for a while, that slipspace malfunction messed with our systems something bad, so *Infinity* is stuck out here till we can finish the repairs. Sorry, Chief\_."}

"I understand, Lasky. I'm gonna lay low and take a little R&R for 48 hours or so, so just leave me a message if you need to."

{"\_I hear ya' Chief. *Infinity* out\_."}

The Master Chief lets out a sigh and walks back into the woman's house, confronting her in the kitchen as she finishes cleaning up. "Sorry to be a burden but I am going to need to stay here for a while until I can get picked up. Is that Ok?"

"Um, sure." Jo shrugs. "I've got a guest room you can use. My name's Jo by the way." She smiles timidly as the man removes his helmet again. She sees that the blood on his forehead has started to dry and she gestures, "Here, come with me for a second please, Master Chief, sir." She leads him to the bathroom where she pulls her first aid kit out and digs around for gauze and a disinfectant.

Master Chief sits down with his back against the wall behind Jo, a little hunched over, his legs bent up with his feet out a bit wider

than his hips for better balance. He rests his forearms on his knees. Jo turns around and catches him with his eyes closed and head hanging. She gives him a moment, noting his clenched fists. She listens to his slow breathing while she waits, watching the subtle rise and fall of his rather large chest. After a minute or so she kneels in front of him and puts a hand on his forearm. "Chief?" Her voice is very soft.

Master Chief looks up and blinks a few times. "Sorry. Go ahead."

Jo smiles softly and pours some of the liquid onto a pad of gauze, scoots up closer to Master Chief and gently takes the side of his face in her free hand. She tilts his head a little so that she can better reach the cut and carefully wipes away the dried blood from his face. She cleans the blood from his hair and then brushes it aside to clean the actual wound.

"This will probably sting," She warns as she positions a wad of gauze at the bottom of the wound to absorb the disinfectant as she pours it meticulously across the cut on his head. His brow furrows a little as the cold liquid dribbles across the wound. With another pad of gauze she wipes the cut carefully and puts a glob of gel antiseptic on it and tapes some gauze over it. "There, it ain't pretty but it'll do."

For the first time in over three months, Master Chief lets the corner of his mouth twitch up in a momentary lopsided smile. "Thank you, Jo." He says very softly, his voice distant

"You're welcome. Here let me show you to the room you can use." She leads him down the hallway to the other end of her house to the bedroom across from hers. It has a queen size bed and small walk-in closet, nothing fancy but suitable for a guest to make their own.

"Again, thank you very much, Jo." He says in a soft tone.

Jo points over her shoulder, "You know where the bathroom is. I'll let you settle in." She parts with a small smile and heads back to the living-room and turns on the television to watch the news, not sure what else to do.

The Master Chief closes the door softly, turning to face the empty room. He heaves a heavy sigh and sets his helmet on the bed. He then turns and sits on the floor, back resting on the bed. He holds his head in his hands for a moment before laying his head back on the bed and letting his bent legs slide to the floor. He crosses his arms over his chest and closes his tired eyes.

"\_John," Cortana reaches out and puts her hand on his chest armor, "I've waited so long to do that." She breathes, looking up into John's eyes. There are tears on his cheeks. Her hand goes from solid to what he can only describe as ethereal and passes through his armor to his bare skin, where he feels a cool snap of static and then a gentle touch. Cortana is pressing her palm to his chest. His jaw clenches. His mind urges him to pull her body into his but when he reaches out she steps back. "Cortana, please!" Cortana continues to back away forlornly. "Welcome home, John." She whispers as she vanishes. "Cortana! Wait!"\_ He cries out and jolts awake at the sound of his own voice shouting those very same words. He can feel the

pounding of his heart throughout his body and he trembles. The clock on the wall says 4:45 pm. Cold tears are on his cheeks and he blinks in the muddled confusion of his exhausted mind for a moment. He gets his bearings again and wipes his face, swallowing hard.

There's a knock on the door to the room and it startles him, adrenaline once again coursing uninvited, through his veins. "Jo?" He ventures, and she answers with a concerned "Are you alright? I heard you yell." She opens the door to find him sitting on the floor against the bed. His face gleams with a sheen of sweat.

"I'mâ€|" He hesitates, letting out a soft breath through his nose. "I'm struggling, to be fully upfront with you." He hangs his head, having no idea why he feels like he can, and should, tell her what happened, what he is feeling, and why his heart feels like it's been torn apart. All feelings he does not fully understand. And it terrifies him since he never before truly had to deal with them. He did seek therapy at captain Lasky's prompting, but only went to two sessions. He couldn't talk to the therapist. All he could manage was to stare at the floor and nod yes or no to a few questions. He shut down. Any mission he could take, he did, trying desperately to fill the void with action.

With something.

Anything.

But still, he felt hollow and broken. He refused any offers of taking another AI. He was so broken, he even avoided Doctor Halsey. He didn't know what to do, so he did what he knew; work missions. This last mission was debris clean up. The mission was simple, transport the decommissioned covenant vessel to Charybdis IX to be disassembled for valuable metals and parts. He was there as the muscle and protection if needed.

John's brow furrows when he realizes Jo is now squatting next to him, reaching out to his chest. Instinct kicks in and he immediately jolts to the present. His body going on the defensive, his armor responds in kind with clicks and whines as his muscles tense and he scoots back into a predatory crouch five feet away. This all happens in a split second and Jo lets out a shocked cry at Chief's raw power and almost feral behavior, drawing back, eyes wide. Realization dawns in the next moment for John and he immediately drops to his hands and knees and crawls the few feet back to Jo, kneels in front of her and puts a reassuring (he hopes at least) hand on her shoulder. "I am so very sorry Jo. I did not mean to startle you, it's just, you kind of startled me."

Jo blinks a few times, her mind going a mile a minute. He really moves wickedly fast. "I'm sorry," are her first words then she instinctively puts her hand over the one he has on her shoulder, holding him there for a moment before she pulls his hand away and puts it in his lap. Then she reaches for his forehead, wiping the sweat away and checking the bandage. "Are you sure you're ok? You kind of drifted off for a moment there."

John takes a long breath and lets it out. He looks down at the floor, "I'm not sure I \_am \_ok." He sighs again and looks up at Jo, again feeling that urge to tell her everything.

So, he does. He talks more than he ever has in his life. He tells this complete stranger about everything. It would be safe to say that pretty much all of it is classified above top secret, but he doesn't much care. He tells her about what happened to him regarding the Halo Rings, with the Covenant, and most importantly about Cortana. How, through everything, she was there for him, keeping him sane. Guiding him. Protecting him.

John at last relates his final exchange with Cortana to Jo. How she acted, what she said—he gets lost as a sharp pain twists and clenches in the center of his chest at the thought of the last time he saw her. She had touched him, actually touched him for the first, and only time. He finds himself wishing with everything he has that he could have felt her hand grace his chest instead of his armor and he swallows hard on the knot in his throat and clenches his fists again.

"Master Chief— She loved you. You do know that, right?" Jo's words hit him like a freight train, and stop him cold for a moment.

His rational mind kicks in, "But, she was an Artificial Intelligence construct, how—"

Jo interrupts him, "From what you've told me, she was no normal Artificial Intelligence construct, Master Chief. You said she was a direct scan of Doctor Halsey's brain. That makes her very different. That also means that if Halsey is still around, you can quite possibly get Cortana back. I may not know everything, but I do have a pretty damn good working knowledge of AI constructs and theoretically, how scanned constructs function and store data."

John looks confused, how would she know all this?

"Master Chief, I'm sure you know that the UNSC never populates a planet with regular civilians. When they repopulated Charybdis nine after the Covenant wiped out that first colony, it was repopulated with scientists. Like me. We pretty much all served in the ONI Science wing in one way or another. That's why there's even a colony out here to begin with. My particular job was researching and developing new AI's. Lucky you, huh?" Jo offers a soft smile.

Master Chief is reeling. There is a shocking amount of 'luck' he's been having lately. Seriously it's just his luck that after losing his closest friend and AI companion of nearly eight years, that he should practically fall into the lap of someone who could very well be the key to bringing Cortana back.

He tries not to get his hopes up though, it may not even work and even if she does somehow get another Cortana created, it wouldn't be her. Not the Cortana John knows. There are so many memories, so much they went through that made them who they were, and are. Chief drops his eyes and hangs his head. "It wouldn't be her—" he breathes.

"I'm pretty sure you can help with that part. But that's enough for one day. So, what's your actual name, Master Chief? You've told me so much—but that's the one thing you've skirted around—"

Master Chief turns his head up to look at Jo and blinks. His eyes focus here and there for a few moments before he looks Jo in the eyes



and takes a deep breath. "John. My name is John."

## 2. Chapter 2

\*\*~~Chapter Two~~\*\*

John is sleeping on the mattress, which he moved to the floor so the bed frame wasn't crushed under his immense weight.

Deep in REM sleep, his breaths are long and slow and his eyes move about energetically beneath his eyelids as he dreams. He has been asleep for ten hours now, not wanting to waste the chance to get sleep; a luxury that comes very rarely for him.

Even if those hours are a vivid, living nightmare.

His nightmares are twisted perversions of his actual experiences. They are the realization of the fear that he hides from the world.

And from himself.

\_John sprints towards the Didact, only to be swatted away by some invisible force the ancient creature controls. He tumbles onto the light bridge before finally rolling to his feet in a wide, deep crouch, preparing to pounce in the very next heartbeat if need be. His shields are fully drained from the blow, and the warning alarm is wailing in his ears. The nuclear warhead has been dislodged from his back and lies only feet away from him. He looks quickly at the Didact, then the warhead, then back at the Didact, then he dives for the warhead as his shields start to recharge. \_

\_He is stopped midair, his shields completely knocked offline by the restraining force. He reaches desperately for the warhead as his chest is squeezed painfully tight by the Didact's Invisible Hand as it pulls him away. The Didact manipulates John in midair, straining the man's body just for the pleasure of hearing him moan in agony.\_

\_He holds the Master Chief aloft by the chest, immobilizing him. The Didact's eyes narrow in distaste as he draws John closer to him so that he now hovers, suspended by the Invisible Hand a few feet away from the Didact. The pressure on his chest increases and his armor presses tighter under the pressure around his torso. \_

\_John groans and gasps, his heart racing in desperation as the space in which it occupies slowly shrinks, his lungs are starting to bruise as they are crushed tighter and tighter by the Invisible Hand.

\_

\_The Didact simply stares coldly as this weak, fragile human hangs suspended by his chest, arms stretching down and back and head thrown back. "How truly fragile, your speciesâ€|" He rumbles, tilting his head and emphasizing the 'i' in fragile. "Even with your, sophisticated exo-suit, you are still nothing more than a little ragdoll with whom I can do whatever I please." \_

\_The Didact draws John's face close to his and narrows his eyes, "Your delicate internal structures struggle to continue functioning,"

He looks down at John's chest for a moment, and scans the orange beam across his torso; seeing through the heavy armor, bruised skin, tearing muscle and cracking bone, directly at his heart and lungs as they strain against his crushing telepathic grip, "with such a gentle squeeze." John's gasps for air are choked, and then halted altogether as the Didact clenches his fist tighter for a moment, contracting the vice the Invisible Hand has around his torso to the point where John can't breathe at all. Time stretches on into an eternity for John as his vision narrows to nearly a pinpoint in the blackness. He is a moment away from losing consciousness. Then, the Didact's grip loosens and John takes a desperately deep breath and lets it out as stars explode in his vision. He pants for a moment and his head lolls forward, chin to chest.\_

"\_Pathetic." The Didact now reaches out with his right hand and touches John's chest armor and it disintegrates from around him. Then the Didact touches his forearm plating, followed shortly by his abdominal and shoulder plating. John is fully panicking when Didact touches the golden visor and the helmet disintegrates. \_

\_John is quickly stripped down to his black, skintight underarmor. The Didact reaches out and puts a single pointed digit on the center of John's heaving chest and drags it down to just above his navel, ripping through the material and into his skin. John cries out in pain, his breaths heavy and rapid and his face twisted in a grimace. Blood quickly runs down his torso and drips down his legs to the light bridge below. Tears of agony start to run down his face at the searing pain in his torso.\_

\_The Didact grimaces, "Such intense expression!" Didact caresses the pad of his thumb in the gash, covering the digit in crimson blood. "Show me more." He rubs the slick blood between thumb, index and forefinger, looking back up at John's face. "I've always wanted to perform a vivisection!" upon a human." He shoves his index finger into the open gash above John's sternum and drags his claw through to the bone.\_

John's agonized scream not only wakes him, but Jo as well and the latter rushes to the room and knocks on the door.

"John?"

John's chest aches and his whole body is covered in sweat underneath his armor. His heart pounds in his ears and his body trembles uncontrollably with his ragged breathing. His mind replays flashes of the Didact's claws covered in blood, his chest gouged and bleeding, the dripping blood on the light bridge, his grimacing and alien face over and over as his hands grip the edges of the bed like vices.

"John!" Jo tries to open the door but he's locked it. Damn the military and their safety training!

It felt so real, he could feel the flesh tearing beneath the Didact's claw. John looks anxiously around the room, blinking rapidly.

"JOHN!" Jo cries out desperately, and John finally responds with a choked sound as he sits up.

Jo grabs the peg key from atop the doorframe and unlocks the door, opens it and rushes over. Without hesitation she kneels between his legs in front of him and immediately takes his face in her hands and looks into his glazed over eyes. His breathing is ragged and uneven. He reminds her of a child after a nightmare. Almost exactly the same, except he's over eight feet tall and probably in his mid forties.

"John, look at me! Look at me, it was just a dream, John. Do you understand?" She can see his pulse pounding frantically in his neck. "Please, say something!" She begs, smoothing a hand gently over his head and dropping the other to rest over the sternal plating on his chest armor.

Finally, his icy blue eyes focus on her and he swallows hard, brow furrowed intensely. His jaw clenches and unclenches and finally he speaks, "The Didact was going to dissect me while I was still alive." His eyes dart around the room anxiously, "I could feel my skin and muscles tearing!" His body shakes.

Jo is shocked at the vivid and gruesome nature of his dream and the only thing she can think to do is wrap her arms around his torso as tightly as she can and hold him, burying her face into his neck. "It's ok, John. It was only a dream." She whispers softly against the side of his neck and closes her eyes, willing him to respond in some way.

John is a bit taken aback by this strange gesture but there's an energy that comes off of her that works to somewhat smooth his frayed nerves and instinct kicks in. Lifting his right arm, he gently wraps it around her torso, pulling her closer.

"Why are you doing this for me, Jo?" John whispers after a long span of silence.

"Because, you are a broken man, John. Someone has to hold you together." Jo whispers, pulling back and looking into his face.

Jo's words ring true and a pang of emptiness twinges in his chest. He is broken. So very broken without Cortana. And oh how he wishes that he could just wake up and it all have been a dream and Cortana is there to chastise him for dozing off.

Jo lets him go and sits down cross-legged in front of him, between his feet, her hands in her lap. John's elbows rest on the insides of his thighs as he hunches over, holding his face in his hands.

"I'm sorry I woke you." John's gravelly voice makes her jump, as she was lost in thought.

"It's ok, John. Really." Jo looks at the clock, "There are still a few hours till sunrise. Try to get a little more sleep." She gets off the bed and goes to leave the room. John watches her walk away and Jo notices this out of the corner of her eye. "What's wrong?"

John is looking at her with a distant sort of expression. "You walk like she did." His eyes shift down but his head does not move.

Jo is not sure what to say. Finally something forms on her tongue, "We will find a way, John. You have my word." She walks over and puts

her hand over one of his, squeezing it before departing with a reassuring smile.

When the door closes he lets himself collapse back onto the mattress with a grunt and he stares at the ceiling until his eyes become weary and heavy-lidded. He closes them and drifts back into unconsciousness.

"UNSC \_Infinity\_, this is Master Chief Petty Officer John, Spartan - One One Seven, how do you copy?"

A few moments of silence.

{"\_Good copy Sierra one one seven, this is Captain Lasky. Good to hear from you again, it's been a few days. Go ahead\_."} }

"Likewise, Captain. Do you have an ETA for extraction yet?"

'\_He sure is not a man of many words, and certainly one of getting straight to the point with no bullshit.\_' Lasky thinks to himself. {"\_Sorry Chief, Infinity's slipspace drive is still hosed. Have to wait for a replacement drive. Gonna be a good month or so. We have a team preparing an extraction on another, smaller slipspace capable frigate, but they won't have any birds back from sorties till another three weeks out. Just hang in there Big Guy\_."} Lasky's voice is reassuring. Or at least that's what he hoped to convey to the Master Chief.

John sighs softly, "I understand. Thanks for the update, Captain. Chief out." John cuts the communications signal and heaves another sigh, putting his hands on his hips. He looks up at the bright sun and the visor immediately tints darker, polarizing precisely so that John can actually make out the roiling miasma that is the solar surface. A sudden chill shoots down his spine and static makes his hair stand up.

Then, a voice comes through his mind that stops his heart cold.

"\_John?\_"

John's head swims and he stumbles for a moment before catching himself. "Cortana?" His voice catches in his throat as he speaks her name aloud.

"\_No John,\_" the voice corrects tenderly and John's heart clenches painfully as it sinks dejectedly.

"\_I am The Librarian, recall that we met on Requiem.\_"

John only has to think for a moment before he remembers her, and what she did to him to initiate his transformation, as well as make him capable of defeating Ur-Didact. He swallows hard, then speaks aloud, "I do remember you. You were the one who changed my perspective on my entire existence. I still have many questions for you, Librarian. First being what the hell did you do to me?"

"\_I apologize for the brevity of my instruction to you during our previous encounter, but time was very short. I will entertain your questions when the time is right. Now, it is quite apparent to me you

are still very much at odds with your new-found emotions. I also understand that it is still very difficult for you to cope with the loss of your ancilla because of this. I know you two were very close. I apologize also for the manner in which I contacted you. Telepathy is challenging at times because of our distance. But all you need to do is think what you want to say, I will hear you. Now, forgive me for abruptly changing the subject matter of this conversation, but I need to talk to you about something very important. Please listen carefully, as we have a very limited amount of time until this connection will be broken by the star around which Genesis orbits\_."

John does not even hesitate, 'Go.'

The Librarian speaks quickly but clearly into John's mind, "\_Reclaimer, you must acquire a large data storage device that is compatible with the data port on your helmet. I have a large package of critical information I need you to store and keep safe for me. Its contents are, at this time, unimportant to you. I simply need you to hold on to it for me, as it is not safe here. Do you understand what I ask of you?\_"

'I understand. How much time do I have?' John thinks quickly, his brow furrowed.

"\_Not much, I am afraid. Act swiftly, Spartan. You have an hour and a half, two at most\_."

'Right. I will do what I can for you.'

"\_I know you will, John. Now go\_!"

John needs no further prompting, he immediately calls out for Jo as he runs back into the house. "Jo?" He practically skids into the kitchen, gaze darting quickly around in search of her.

Empty.

"Jo!" he bellows desperately, looking through to the living room before running through to the hallway. "Jo, where are you?"

He nearly runs her over as she emerges from her bedroom. "JO!" John cries out and takes a quick breath, "I need the largest empty data storage chip you have, or can get. Now."

Jo blinks a few times, still in shock from being nearly run over by a nine foot tall, yelling Spartan. She regards the frantic man, fully armored and admittedly quite intimidating. His body trembles with a desperate kind of anxiety she hasn't seen in him in their short time together. "Steady, Master Chief. Take a deep breath and reign in."

John's fists clench so tightly in irritation that the fabric and metal creaks and groans. "Time is short." He rumbles in frustration with this civilian who clearly has no clue as to the importance of haste in this situation.

Jo notes his demeanor and puts a sterner expression on, "John, take a deep breath. Now."

It suddenly clicks for John that she can't help him if he behaves in this manner, letting his emotions run wild, and so he obliges, taking in a long breath and letting it out slowly, his fists unclench and his shoulders loosen. He quietly kicks himself, cursing these damned emotions and their cunning ability to get the better of him in critical situations.

"Ok, good, now how big does this drive need to be exactly? What kind of data are we storing?" Jo asks calmly.

"I don't know what kind, only that it's a large amount, probably a few tens of terabytes." John reaches up to the back of his head and absently thumbs the data chip slot there on the back of his helmet. Another important parameter pops into his head, "It also needs to be compatible with my helmet." He adds, taking off his helmet and showing Jo the slot he was referring to.

"Ok, I don't own one that big, but there's a tech depot twenty minutes from here that I know for sure has drives that big."

"Good, let's get moving." John replies, sliding his helmet back on.

Jo laughs at John's eagerness and gives him a smile. "Wait in the foyer, I have to put on my shoes and grab my wallet and keys."

John nods curtly and does a slick about face and walks into the foyer, standing at parade rest by the door.

Twenty two minutes later, Jo parks her jeep and cuts the engine, climbing out. Master Chief follows shortly, taking a moment to properly unfold himself from the diminutive vehicle, and they walk into the store. John makes a beeline to the front counter and greets the sales clerk in short military fashion before he asks, "What is the largest portable data storage device you have?" John reaches up and removes his helmet, "It must fit this data port." He turns the helmet and indicates the access terminal on the back of the helmet.

Jo just now makes it to the counter. John looks down at her and she just gives John a look of 'Calm down' to which he replies with a stern glare, setting his helmet on the counter.

She then reaches into her purse and pulls out a little box. She lifts the lid and pulls out a chip that looks to be identical to the data chip Cortana was stored on, and shows it to the clerk. "It should look like this."

The clerk takes the chip, examines it for a moment and looks at Jo, then up at John. "I'll be right back." With a smile she turns and disappears into the back.

John crosses his arms and looks down at Jo with a furrowed brow, "I thought you said you didn't have any chips that big? That was clearly a large capacity solid crystal state storage chip." Tilting his head back a little, John reaches his left hand down the front of his collar to pull up his dog tags and, hanging from the chain is an identical, although more damaged looking drive. John takes it gently between his right thumb and forefinger and holds it out so Jo can see it. "This was hers."

Jo's chest tightens. The look in his eyes hits home. Her hand twitches up to reach for it but she stops herself as he carefully lowers the tags and chip back down beneath his chest armor. "I'm sorry, John it is an old chip that used to hold a smart AI, but the chip was deeply corrupted when the AI fell into rampancy. I just never got around to recycling the chip."

John's brows relax slightly and he looks away with a soft "mmh" to indicate he understands. Silence falls between them as they wait. John's leg bounces a little and he crosses his arms over his broad chest again. Jo looks over at him and chuckles quietly, shaking her head when suddenly John's whole demeanor changes and he leans forward to the counter, gripping it with his hands. His head hangs like he's been suddenly drained of his energy. She is at his side the next moment, hands on his arm and face peering up into his face. "John? Are you ok?"

"\_John, it is I, The Librarian. I detected large quantities of raw data storage near your location, Have you procured a drive yet?\_"

'I'm about to,' John looks at Jo, "Yes, I'm fine," he rumbles, looking up as the clerk returns with a box and hands the old chip to Jo and the new box to John.

"It's thirty five terabytes. Is that enough?"

John nods and starts to open the box.

"\_Good job, Spartan. Are you near a power source?\_"

'Do power outlets count?' John inquires mentally.

"\_If they are putting out an alternating current at his juncture, they do.\_" The Librarian replies.

'Then, yes.' John states as he frees the data chip from its container and puts his helmet back on.

"\_Good. Insert the chip now, John. I am going to use your suit's energy to solidify the connection while I transfer this data. Prepare.\_"

He obeys and as soon as the gold contact plates connect to their pairs in the port in his helmet, he immediately drops to his hands and knees with a heavy groan as his armor's shields and power core are drained. Jo yells in shock and drops down beside him reaching out to touch him.

"Stay back!" John yells, louder and much more forcefully than he originally intended, but better to terrify the woman and save her life than have her immediately electrocuted. There's an intense blue arc of electricity that leaps out from the nearest wall outlet and the lights in the store dim as that energy pours into John's armor.

Jo is shocked by the ferocity of John's warning, however understands plainly why he was so fierce after seeing that arc of electricity jump to the armor from the wall outlet a few feet away. "John, are

you alright?"

John nods. "Sorry I yelled. You would have been electrocuted had you touched me."

"I see that now, thank you. What's happening?" Jo asks, keeping her distance from him.

John turns around and sits on the floor, leaning back against the counter, his head hitting the wood with a solid thud. "The Librarian is transferring a massive amount of some type of data to the storage drive. She tells me she is using the power from my suit, and the outlets nearby to create a secure and stable link between her plane and ours."

"Oh." She says, as if this was a normal occurrence. "I'm going to pay for that chip, then." Jo stands up and meets the cashier at the next register down since John's gigantic frame is very much in the way of the first one.

A few minutes pass and John finally stirs, having been totally silent and motionless up until now. 'Is that all of it?' he thinks, knowing that she can hear him.

"\_Yes John. It is protected by a biolock that only you can access, so when the time comes, you are the key. Protect this data; keep it safe for me. May fortune continue to smile upon you, Reclaimer\_."

'I will. Thank you, Librarian.' John stands carefully and looks down at the cashier, "Thank you very much for your rapid response."

Jo thanks the cashier as well and motions for John to follow and they exit the store and head back for Jo's house. About five minutes into the drive, Jo glances at John, who meets her gaze through his golden visor, "So, John, tell me what's just transpired. What kind of data do you have now?"

John takes a long breath and sighs audibly as he searches for a way to concisely explain this scenario to Jo. He can't. Another sigh before he starts speaking. "Okay, according to The Librarian, it is a package of data that she needs me to hold on to for her until further notice. She told me that its contents were unimportant to me at this time."

Jo blinks a few times, staring hard at the road ahead of her. "Okay," she says slowly. "So, now what?"

John crosses his arms, "I don't know. I'm not a scientist." He looks over at her and she glances at him as he says, "I'm a Spartan." He looks back at the road.

Jo sighs and looks forward again, "Right. That's my job to figure out. As the scientist."

The remainder of the ride home is silent.

### 3. Chapter 3

\*\*~~Chapter Three~~\*\*



"Jo, I need to get this armor off for a little while." John says over breakfast Tuesday morning, three days after the data transfer.

Jo looks at him with a puzzled expression. "Well what do you need me for? Take it off if it's bothering you."

John lets out a soft sigh, "If it were that easy, I would have been out of it already. It has to be manually removed, as I am fairly certain Charybdis Nine does not have a Spartan armor facility."

Jo laughs, "No, you're right, we don't. Do we need powered equipment? I heard the armor is pretty heavy."

"I walk around in it daily, it won't be a problem for me. You unscrew, and I'll remove the pieces." John goes back to eating his breakfast.

"Fair enough. Let's see, about the tools then. What do I need?" She asks more to herself really, than to Chief, walking over and taking his arm and scrutinizing the screws that hold the forearm plates together. "Um, I'm probably going to have to call my friend Wallace. He's a heavy machinery mechanic for the UNSC so I know he has the powered drivers that we'll probably need. These look pretty standard for the UNSC, at least when it comes to nuts and bolts."

John lets the corner of his mouth curve up just for a moment, "Perfect. When can you contact him?" He finishes his last bite of toast and looks over at Jo.

"Not until \_next\_ \_Tuesday. That's his next day off."

"What's today?" John asks before drinking down his glass of orange juice.

"Tuesday." Jo says as she takes his plate, utensils, and empty glass to the sink.

"Oh." John sighs. "May I have more orange juice?"

Jo pours him another glass.

It's Thursday afternoon after lunch and the mighty Spartan, John-117 is sprawled out on the sofa in Jo's living room. The back of his neck rests in a rather uncomfortable looking fashion on the armrest so that his head sort of hangs over the edge. His legs are draped over the opposite armrest. His right arm hangs back over the armrest by his head and the back of the other hand hangs to the floor awkwardly. His eyes are closed and his face quite serene with barely parted lips.

Jo walks in on this scene after finishing lunch and just stares. He literally takes up the \_entire\_ sofa. Shamelessly, she might add. She is sorely tempted to snap a photo with her phone and goes so far as to reach into her pocket and grab the device when John's expression changes radically.

His face is now what she can only describe as twisted by anguish. Her eyes go wide as tears slip from his tightly clenched eyes. She wants to reach out to him and starts to move towards him as a grief

stricken sob escapes his throat.

She breaks on the inside for this man.

"Waitâ€|" he speaks, voice broken and soft.

Realization hits her like a ton of bricks. He must be dreaming of Cortana.

A long, quiet and heartbreaking sigh/sob breaks the silence and Jo's eyes prickle with the threat of tears. She leaves the room, unable to handle the raw emotion.

\_Cortana, standing the height of a normal human now, walks gracefully towards John with a tender smile on her face. \_

\_The Master Chief blinks a few times to try and clear his vision, but her image persists. "How-?"\_

"\_Oh, so I'm the strangest thing you've seen all day?"Her expression is mild, but amused.\_

"\_But, if we're hereâ€|"\_"\_

"\_It worked. You did it! Just like you always do."Cortana smiles. But pain and sadness underlie her subdued expression.\_

\_Looking around the blue hard-light sphere that surrounds them, John asks, "So, how do we get out of here?" Then, he looks back down at Cortana.\_

"\_I'm not coming with you this time."\_

"\_What?" The word comes out in a harsh and disbelieving tone, but he sounds genuinely hurt. It came out sharp and it echoes briefly within the sphere.\_

\_Cortana looks down far past her feet at the crumbling ship that was The Didact's. "Most of me is down there, I only held back enough to get you off the ship." Her voice wavers.\_

\_Immediately after she finishes talking John insists, "No. That's not-" he looks away for a moment before turning back to her, resolve giving his tone an edge and his head tilts somewhat defiantly, "-we go together." He says with certainty and finality in his tone.\_

"\_It's already done." Cortana's face is sad, defeated, but she still manages a half hearted smile.\_

\_John steps closer, his tone stern, "I am \_not\_ leaving you here."\_

\_Cortana softens and walks up to him. He watches her closely, "John," she lifts her left hand and presses it gently to his chest armor and lets out a quiet sigh. Her eyes close and the rapid, anxious beating of John's heart softly fills the air as she speaks again, "I've waited so long to do that."Her eyes open, her expression appears to be on the verge of tears as her hand drops from his chest and the sphere is blanketed in silence again.\_

\_John looks away and down to his left now, as her hand drops to her side, "It was my job, to take care of you." He says slowly, his tone one of defeat.\_

\_Cortana leans in and looks up into his face, "We were supposed to take care of each other." And John immediately looks back down at her. "And we did," her voice almost breaks and she smiles up at him, brow furrowed with a heavy burden of sadness and guilt.\_

"\_Cortana," his voice comes out smoother and pleading as he looks away. "Please." He begs.\_

\_Cortana's expression becomes forlorn and she once more reaches up to touch his chest, letting her hand slide off as she backs away from him.\_

"\_Waitâ€|" he speaks, voice broken and soft as he reaches his left hand out to her.\_

\_John is on the verge of a breakdown as Cortana looks back at him with a sorrowful expression, "Welcome home, John." She says in a comforting manner, although her voice wavered as if she was about to break down into tears. Then she steps back and disappears.\_

\_John's head is filled now with deafening silence punctuated by the mortified pounding of his own heart in his ears as his whole world literally crumbles around him. The solid light sphere that surrounded him disappears in a blinding white flash and he is left alone in the emptiness of space, floating amongst the debris and destroyed remains of The Didact's ship. A broken sob seizes his abdomen in a painful, heart-wrenching spasm and the tears flow freely. He takes a hard, sobbing breath and then he cries out with everything he has left into the void, "No!"\_

John gasps as he wakes suddenly under crushing chest pain and a tear and sweat-drenched face, his heart pounding in his ears. His hands immediately grip the closest part of the sofa they touch and the Master Chief gasps again, still struggling to breathe through the uncontrollable sobs that tear him apart from the inside out with grief. "Fuckâ€|" he moans, swallowing hard.

A thought flashes through his stricken mind and he shakily pushes himself off the sofa and sort of stumbles to the guest bedroom, grabbing his helmet from the bed side table and sliding it over his head.

Jo hears John wake with a start and glimpses him passing her door as he stumbles into the guest room. Walking to just outside his door, she listens as his helmet is drug off the table, followed by a hiss as it pressurizes to his suit.

The HUD powers up and John tries to level his breathing so that he can speak, "Cuh-, Cortanaâ€|." He pleads desperately.

Silence.

He waits thirty seconds.

"Cortana..." he actually cries her name softly, hoping beyond hope

that somehow she might be able to hear his voice.

Still, more silence.

"John?" the voice is so soft he nearly misses it.

"Cortana?" he breathes softly in disbelief, tears stream down his face.

"John," the voice's tone is different now; a descending note of poignant sadness. He then registers a presence and he looks up at his doorway to see Jo standing there.

John's stomach drops like a lead weight. Absolutely crushed, he drops to his knees, staring at Jo. The floor trembles a bit and she rushes over to his side and pulls off his helmet. As the rim of the helmet clears his forehead, John reaches out and his hand gently grips her side before he collapses heavily to the right, taking Jo down with him.

Jo hits the floor hard and it knocks the wind out of her. For a moment she sees stars as she tries to regain control of her diaphragm. And when she at last does, she pulls herself from beneath John's heavy arm and crawls around to his head. "John?"

No response. A surge of adrenaline and her EMT training kicks in, and she is shoving two fingers under the neck sheath of John's underarmor in search of his pulse. Leaning over she listens intently for breathing. To her immense relief, he has a steady pulse and is still breathing.

Her mind now stumbles over why he lost consciousness. Her first thought comes sailing in from left field; emotional overload? Perhaps he could not handle the massive inflow of not only emotions, but their associated hormones, overwhelming his body into a state of shock. She remembers learning quite a few years ago that the Spartan-IIs were outfitted with a pituitary implant that inhibited their emotional response and other such things that could be seen as distracting. So why then is John experiencing these high powered emotions if he has such an implant?

The Librarian finally comes to mind. He had mentioned that the Librarian had done something to him that altered him physiologically, perhaps destroying the implant altogether. That would explain his catastrophic inability to cope with the heart-wrenching grief of the loss of someone whom he cared for immensely. And then there's the sense of suffocating disappointment when he realized it was Jo's voice talking to him from his doorway, and not Cortana responding from within his helmet. It makes pretty good sense to her.

Jesus Christ, this guy has it bad. After decades of not having to deal with shit like this, all of a sudden he gets it slammed full into him all at once, and then, he loses his closest companion, just in time to test the troubled waters of emotion out for the very first time. He has no idea how to cope. It's no wonder he reacted the way he did.

A sudden deeply drawn breath snaps Jo's attention back to the present, and she looks down at John who rolls heavily onto his back and rubs his face with his left hand.

"John, I'm so sorryâ€¦" She whispers

"Why does it hurt so much?" He whispers, dropping his hand from his face to his chest.

Jo frowns and leans closer, taking the gauntleted hand he's resting on his chest and squeezing it in her own. "Because you're alive."

"I shouldn't be." He growls quietly, venom laced through his words as he pulls his hand carefully away from hers and drops it to the floor at his side.

"And yet, here you are, John. The powers that be must-"

"Look, I don't want to have this conversation." He says as he looks over at Jo with a pretty cold look on his face. "I should have died on The Didact's ship when I detonated the nuke." His head tilts in an irritated manner, "But I didn't. Because Cortana saved me." His expression grows distant. "By dying herself. That shouldn't have happened." His brow furrows angrily. He looks away a moment later and his expression is unreadable, "I promised her that I would save her." His fists clench, "But I didn't. I let her die." He looks quickly back at Jo, pain in his features now. "I failed. Let her down." John slowly drops his saddened gaze to the floor, his chin quivers ever so slightly.

"But you have pieces of her memoryâ€¦Don't you?"

John looks up, brow furrowed, hurt written all over his face. "No. I have fragments of data that were once associated with Cortana." He looks now to be on the verge of breaking down, mouth open and chin trembling "I was reminded of that tonight when she didn't answer." He clenches his eyes shut and hangs his head with a heavy huff. "She's gone," his voice breaks, "and all that's left are dust and echoes."

Jo heaves a tired sigh and gets to her feet. John's icy blue eyes follow her as she rises. "Well, I'm still not giving up." And with that she leaves the room.

John watches her go. Tears flow from his eyes and his lips press together, chin trembling again. His mind is racing, driving up his anxiety. He gets to his feet, working his bottom lip in his teeth, and walks around the other side of the bed frame to lie down on the mattress. He hits the mattress with a huff and folds his arms over his head. 'How do people handle this sort of shit, every day, and not completely lose it?' he wonders as he drifts slowly back towards sleep.

Halsey watches the news on the wall mounted screen across from her bed. The human colonized planet Charybdis-9 was the site of a recent accident involving a decommissioned covenant frigate and-

"John!" Halsey stands up in shock as she watches the amateur videographer follow the flight path of a clearly Spartan-shaped piece of debris to the ground about 100 feet away. The videographer is yelling in shock as more debris rains down around him and he takes cover under a large nearby tree. The video ends with the reporter stating that this event occurred two weeks ago and although there

were ten people injured, there were no casualties and the Spartan is currently being housed by a kind and thoughtful resident near the crash site until the UNSC has an available escort to go pick him up.

Captain Lasky. She has to talk to Captain Lasky. She knows he in all likelihood will refuse to talk to her, but she is desperate to see John, especially after what the Librarian told her about him and her being the most important pieces in the final acquisition of The Mantle by the human race.

Halsey walks up to the door of her room and knocks on the window. The nearby guard comes over and slides open the dollar bill sized hatch in the door below the eye-level window.

"What?" he asks tersely.

"I need to make a phone call." Halsey says simply, unperturbed by the guards short attitude.

"Hang on." He says simply, turning away and walking to go talk to his superior. Halsey waits patiently by the door for a full seven minutes before another, different guard comes to her door.

"Who are you trying to contact?" she asks.

"Captain Thomas Lasky, if the UNSC \_Infinity\_."

The woman's expression turns into one of amusement, "You do remember that he is the one that had you sent here, right? What makes you think he'll even entertain the idea of talking to you?"

"I'm not delusional. Let's not make this complicated. I know what kind of relationship I have with Captain Lasky, I also know that he is at least semi-reasonable."

The woman sighs and produces her cellular phone, dials a quick number and gets an answer immediately. "Yes, this is Captain Nova. I need to make a call to a UNSC personnel. Yes. Halsey. Yes, the UNSC \_Infinity\_, Captain Lasky. Uh huh. Thank you." She hangs up and pulls her key card from her pocket and swipes it over the locking mechanism on the door, opening it. "Follow me, Catherine."

Halsey obeys, clasping her hands in front of her body and following the guard. They walk down a hall and into another room that Nova had to unlock with her card. There is a large conference table surrounded by thirteen chairs and a conference apparatus in the center, a holotank right next to it.

Nova leans over the table and indicates the chair beside her. Catherine sits in it. And the two other guards stand ready at the door. "Carrie." She queries and an AI materializes in the holotank; a short woman, manifesting with darker shoulder length hair and plain civilian clothes. She smiles.

"Evening, Captain Nova. I received the directive on contacting the \_Infinity\_. Would you like me to proceed?" the AI says simply.

Nova nods, "Yes please. Hail the captain if you could."

"Right away." The AI chimes pleasantly

A few moments later, "\_This is Captain Lasky of the UNSC \_Infinity. \_May I know who I am speaking with?\_"

Halsey greets Lasky with a terse "Hello, Captain." then jumps straight into what she needs to say. "I just heard on television what happened to John on Charybdis-9. I know that he will be brought to the \_Infinity\_ when he is picked up. All I ask is that you allow me to see him when he is brought onboard. There is much I need to discuss with him."

Lasky frowns on the other end of the line. He does not at all trust this woman. And he most certainly is not happy that he has to hold a conversation with her, especially about John. "\_You are a war criminal, who has most certainly earned my distrust as of late. What makes you think I am going to even consider entertaining the idea of possibly letting you on the \_Infinity\_? How do I know you aren't gonna try something like the \_last\_ time I let you aboard my ship?\_"

"I beg your pardon, \_captain,\_" she replies tersely, "But do remember who \_designed\_ that ship. Who gave you the engines and essentially installed them as well. Remember \_that\_ before you claim ownership of that vessel. Now, if it would make you feel better, I shall be allowed zero access to any tech while onboard, AI or otherwise. 24-hour armed escort, Spartans of course just to be safe. I'll be confined to my quarters unless expressly allowed by you to leave, and wherever I go I will be escorted by my two guards. Just get me onboard the \_Infinity\_ before you get John."

Lasky heaves a heavy sigh. The pause drags on for thirty seconds. "\_I'll see what I can do\_." He hangs up.

Halsey's brows rise in mild and short lived surprise. She then sighs in offence at Lasky's rudeness. She stands and looks at Nova, "Shall we?" she inquires, gesturing to the door.

Nova nods to the two guards who open the door and let Halsey out, one walking in front of her, followed by Nova and the other guard behind as they head back to Halsey's cell. The door is opened and she is led back in.

"Thank you for your time." Halsey says simply and goes to sit back down on her bed in the far corner of her cell. The door closes with a thud and a click as the lock engages.

"John, I just got off the phone with my friend, Wallace." Jo says and John looks up at her from reading an old National Geographic magazine he found buried on her bookshelf.

"I assume you have news then, regarding when we will be paying him a visit." John says, eyebrows arched slightly as he closes the magazine to regard Jo. The front cover is a beautiful photograph of the Earth from the early 22nd century, taken from the International Space Station. The cover story is about how the Earth may not look so beautiful for much longer unless drastic steps are taken to preserve her.

"I do. He had to swap shifts with someone, so he has today off

instead of Tuesday. He said he can head over whenever, and he'll help you take off your armor."

"Oh, good." John places the National Geographic on the coffee table and stands, eyebrows arched. "I am ready if you are."

Jo laughs, "Ok John. Fortunately he lives just down the street so it won't take him long. I'll let him know he can head over now."

Ten minutes later, Wallace's big pickup pulls into the driveway.

"John!" Jo calls from the foyer, "He's here!"

John leans out from his guest room, helmet on, "Go ahead and have him make himself comfortable. I was hailed by the \_Infinity\_ so I must contact them before I remove my armor, helmet doesn't work alone."

"Alright John." Jo replies, letting Wallace in.

"Howdy, little lady!" Wallace says through a toothy grin and thick western accent. He's a well-built man standing an even, six feet tall and sporting a well earned tan. He has a rugged but kind face and two day old stubble that is a dark brown, to match his hair.

"Hey, Wallace!" Jo smiles and hugs her friend before pointing at the sofa, "Go ahead and sit down, and I'll get you a coffee."

"Why thank you, Joey, you know me too well!" Wallace says with a smile as he slips his feet out of his cowboy boots at the door, and plops himself comfortably down on the sofa, stretching his strongly muscled arms across the back.

"Ugh, don't call me Joey you lugnut! I thought I told you, I hate that nickname!" Jo grouses as she pours his coffee and walks into the living room with the steaming mug.

"Tha's why I call ya Joey! 'Cuz it gits ya all riled up!" He chuckles and takes the mug, "Thanks for the mud though." He smiles, taking a sip and letting out a pleased moan as the hot liquid warms his belly, "Mmmhh you know just the way I like it; black." He laughs again, setting the mug on the little table by the armrest. "So where's the big guy?" He asks, looking around.

"Oh, John is making a call; he'll be out in a little bit." Jo says as just as John walks out of the back room and down the hallway towards the living room.

"Thank you, Captain Lasky. See you in a week. Chief out." He finishes as he crosses the threshold to the living room and walks towards Wallace, who immediately gets to his feet as John removes his helmet. Tucking it under his left arm, John stands straight and tall before Wallace, dwarfing him by close to four feet, "Master Chief Petty Officer Sierra one one seven." John salutes sharply.

Wallace looks the armor-clad giant over in awe. "Well God-damn. You weren't shittin' me when you said he was close to ten foot tall, Joey."



"Wallace!" Jo complains.

"Sorry," he says apologetically over his shoulder before returning his attention to the Spartan I front of him. "Mighty fine pleasure ta meet you, sir." Wallace extends his hand and John shakes it warmly. "You're pretty damn tall... Anyway, I 'magine you're itchin' ta get outta that armor. So I'll lead the way to the garage."

An hour later, John is setting the last piece of his armor in a neat orderly pile in the back corner of Jo's garage. He is left in his skintight full body suit, sans-gauntlets.

"Thank you very much for assisting me, Wallace." John says with an appreciative tone in his voice.

"My pleasure, Master Chief."

"John." He corrects with a small smile and a tilt of his head.

Wallace laughs, clapping John on his upper arm. "Alright then, John, go ahead on in, I'm gonna get my stuff back into my truck."

John dips his head and ducks inside the door.

Hearing the door to the garage open, Jo looks over from making sandwiches. When she sees John, she drops her mayonnaise covered knife on the counter with a clatter. His underarmor hugs him like a second skin, showing off every battle honed muscle on his body. She really appreciates now, how large this man truly is. Even without the armor he stands a staggering eight feet and a few odd inches tall, and it is not an awkward, or lanky tall either. He is precisely proportionate.

Wide shoulders crown his well defined torso and narrow waist, belying his strength. She has to stop herself from going any further down that glorious midline. "Goodness," is all she can manage to say in a breathy voice as he walks over and stops a few feet to her right, inspecting the four sandwiches she's already made before looking over at the one she is still in the process of making.

"Looks delicious." John says with a genuine, albeit lopsided smile.

Jo fights the growing urge to reply 'So do you,' and settles instead for "Thanks, um-those three are yours, with everything on them." She gestures for the last three in the lineup as she gives the huge Spartan a quick but thorough once over with her eyes as he takes the sandwiches and puts them on a plate. She turns back to finishing the last sandwich when, out of the corner of her eye, she glimpses a chiseled pair of glutes beneath the black honeycomb-patterned underarmor. She can't help herself and she looks at him. John's back is god-like. That's all she can think of to describe it. There is a deep groove down John's spine and the muscles on either side are well defined, dropping more than just a hint at his power and strength. Every bit of him is lean muscle. She clears her throat and returns to her neglected and half-assembled sandwich as John seats himself and starts eating.

Wallace walks in the door and takes a seat in front of John who is

already on sandwich two. "He ain't eatin' you outta house and home is he?" Wallace chuckles good-naturedly.

"No not yet, it's \_you \_ that's doin' me in Wallace!" They both laugh and Jo brings over the last two sandwiches, handing one to Wallace, and setting hers beside him so that she can go get some chips, before sitting down to eat.

There is relative silence as they all eat.

John finishes his last sandwich and gets up, searching the cabinets for a moment before he finds the cups. Stepping a bit closer to the counter, he grabs three glasses from the cabinet and turns to look at Wallace and Jo, "What would you two like to drink?" He asks politely.

Jo's eyebrows shoot up, "Oh damn! I'm sorry, I completely forgot to get you guys drinks! Thank you, John, I'll have ice water, please."

Wallace laughs, "Water too, if you could? Thanks so much." He smiles appreciatively.

After pouring three waters, he brings them all over to the table and sits, distributing them accordingly before taking a sip of his own. "I have news from the \_Infinity\_, Jo." John starts.

Jo looks up from her sandwich with inquiry all over her face as she chews her mouthful.

"There will be a team arriving in six days to pick me up. I would be quite honored if you accompanied me."

Jo's eyes go wide. "I would be happy to, but I'm not sure I have the clearance."

"I already cleared it with the captain, not to worry." John reassures her.

"Oh." Jo takes a moment to register this. Reminding herself of his rank she nods, "Well then yes, I'll come with you."

The corners of John's eyes crinkle as he smiles subtly "Thank you."

\* \* \*

><p><em>Author's Notes: So I am ALMOST done with chapter four. I had to go back in and do some deep cleaning to the first three chapters(actually the whole story lol) because they were not really what I wanted. <em>

\_A BIG thank you to Lyhty for giving me great reviews and encouraging me to rethink the way I went about this story. As always, I love you readers! Hang in there!\_

\_Thanks for the reviews as well! \_

\_See ya in the next Chapter!\_

End  
file.